

Melbourne apartments evacuated after catching fire on Spencer Street

QLD NEWS

## Building regulation changes expensive hit to unit owners

Des Houghton, assistant editor, The Courier-Mail

May 4, 2019 12:54am

 Subscriber only



TENS of thousands of Queenslanders might not know it yet but are facing having to pay up to \$4000 to prove to the State Government their home units and townhouses are free of combustible building materials.

The costly checks by fire safety professionals may then lead to official demands for repair work costing up to \$60,000 per apartment.

Simon Barnard of the Strata Community Association warns the costs will send some homeowners broke and drive up insurance costs.

With the state election due next year the controversy is a ticking time bomb for the Palaszczuk Government with many units in West End, New Farm and Nundah in seats held by the ALP with rather slender margins.



Simon Barnard from the Strata Community Association says thousands of Queensland unit owners will be unfairly penalised by botched cladding laws.

The State Government safety clampdown came after flammable cladding was found to be the cause for London's deadly Grenfell Tower blaze in which 72 people died two years ago. And while it is reasonable to expect unit owners to comply with safety standards, the Government's new cladding laws appear to me to be quite bonkers, with some building materials identified as a potential risk available over the counter at Bunnings and other hardware suppliers.

To prove his point Barnard purchased two wall panels there this week.

Barnard met Housing Minister Mick de Brenni briefly last year. But he and his board did not have the follow up meeting they expected, and were not shown the draft bill before it was suddenly dropped in Parliament.

The snub came even though the Strata Community Association is the industry advocate for Queensland properties insured for \$192 billion.



 Housing and Public Works Minister Mick de Brenni.

Neither did De Brenni's department bother to notify the association of the scope of the new laws before they were introduced to State Parliament last October.

"They passed the legislation without telling us what it contained," Barnard says.

"We could have been of assistance."

The association was told to consult with the Queensland Building and Construction Commission which is conducting the safety audit in three stages.

Barnard says his association had no joy there either.

He says he and his team believe the reporting requirements are onerous and confusing.

He has warned the State Government that a quarter of the population, or 1.6 million Queenslanders, live in units, townhouses and apartments. The new regulations even cover smaller six-pack blocks.



the horror fire that engulfed Grenfell Tower on June 14, 2017 in London. Picture: Getty Images

“Some of them will go broke,” he says.

“We don’t believe the Government has acted wisely.”

He says it is a much bigger problem than the concrete cancer debacle faced by many unit dwellers. At the heart of the controversy is a debate over what constitutes a nonconforming products in the new regulations.

He says: “The definition of combustible cladding was suddenly expanded to include glass and ceramic tiles, canvas, weatherboard and Weathertex, popular hardwood sheets sold at Bunnings.”

The non-combustible fibre cement cladding known as Blue Board was also included.

“It begs the question: Why are they allowed to be sold in the first place?” asks Barnard.

He points out that Weathertex and similar cladding materials are favoured by architects and builders because of their fire resistant properties.

## Lid kept on fire audit buildings

In fact, Weathertex was manufactured from fire-resistant timber species and had a tick of approval from Standards Australia for use in bushfire-prone areas.

“It is not a fire threat, yet the Government has widened the net to include it,” he says.


While the strata association supports the speedy removal of inflammable aluminium claddings like those used at Grenfell Tower, Barnard says the Government should go back to the drawing board before forcing unit owners into unnecessary expense.

“You have the right to be safe in your own home and we support the removal of ACPs (aluminium composite panels) that caused deaths overseas,” he says.

“But the fact that other building materials on the list are freely available at Bunnings makes you wonder what is going on.”

And the Government’s building watchdog is selective.



 Smoke and flames billow from Grenfell Tower as firefighters still work to control the blaze. Picture: AFP/Adrian Dennis

“If you live in a house with Weathertex the government is not interested.”

That same house may have a highly combustible wooden deck on it with a barbecue.

The state may face other problems. Who carries the legal liabilities for buildings lawfully approved under the building codes of the day?

And I'm sure builders using cladding materials that are now under suspicion by the Queensland Building and Construction Commission will wonder where they stand.

Already the QBCC has declined a request from Townsville unit communities for an extension of time to comply with the new rules.

Barnard says the Strata Community Association is again calling on De Brenni to meet its board.

He says: "The regulations are too wide-reaching, capturing building materials not generally deemed combustible."

And the timelines are too tight for bodies corporate "to make collective decisions in a compliant manner".

[desmond.houghton@news.com.au](mailto:desmond.houghton@news.com.au)

## **WERE POLICE GOT AT?**

I'VE already reported allegations that the Queensland Office of Industrial Relations ran "a campaign of harassment" against a concrete manufacturer.

Parliament was told Helen Burgess, an inspector, allegedly bullied cement manufacturer Enco Precast at the behest of that grubby band of thugs, the CFMMEU.

The case took a worrying turn when Parliament was told this week that police were ordered by someone in the State Government to turn a "blind eye" to offences at Enco's plant at Seventeen Miles Rocks.

Jarred Bleijie, the opposition industrial relations spokesman, said information given to him was "alarming" and should be the subject of a royal commission. Bleijie said Helen Burgess and other Workplace Health and Safety directors were deliberately targeting firms at the behest of unions. "Serious accusations of corruption have been levelled against the like of Helen Burgess," he said in Parliament.

Bleijie was not happy the Crime and Corruption Commission "outsourced" a complaint against Burgess to a Sydney HR company. He revealed he wrote to the CCC asking the crime watchdog to retrieve telephone records and texts between Burgess and her CFMMEU contacts.

## **FRANCE A TARGET**


DISABILITY advocate Ali France faces a new hurdle in her bid to topple Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton in the seat of Dickson.

She has incurred the wrath of Teeshan Johnson the unyielding anti-abortion campaigner who heads Cherish Life.

Johnson, whose family is dotted with Labor stalwarts, said Cherish Life had launched a put-Labor-last campaign in seven marginal seats. France was the number one target because she was a pro-abortion Emily's List candidate. Cherish Life is circulating pictures from France's Instagram account showing her actively campaigning for abortion with Deputy Premier Jackie Trad. "Tragically, Labor has become the abortion party," says Johnson.

"There will be more babies killed and more women harmed if Bill Shorten was PM."



 Labor candidate for the seat of Dickson Ali France (right) speaks to the media alongside Deputy Opposition Leader Tanya Plibersek during a visit to Lawnton State School, in the seat of Dickson, yesterday. Picture: AAP/Glenn Hunt

## FLOOD OF COMPLAINTS

STILL more families have come forward to tell me how flooding worsened in their homes after the Airport Link tunnels were completed in 2012. The floods have smashed property prices and are sending home insurance premiums soaring. One man told me he had complained for years about flooding but was fobbed off by a conga line of federal, state and council politicians from both sides of politics. Meanwhile, Cameron Russell, the chief of the Clayfield action group, tells me he has been barred from the office of his local councillor David McLachlan. He says McLachlan has again refused to back an inquiry or even to meet the families hit by flash floods whenever there is a downpour.

## **HALLAM REBUKES CCC**

GREG Hallam, the respected chief of the Local Government Association of Queensland, says the sacking of Logan council “is more about politics than good governance”. He attacked both the Palaszczuk Government and the CCC in his newsletter.

“Seven councillors have been denied natural justice and the people of Logan have no political representation.”

He accused the CCC of overreach and said councillors had every legal right to sack the CEO they could not work with. The CCC overacted in what was an industrial dispute. Said Hallam: “There is no place for the Queensland Criminal Code to be used in industrial relations matters.”

## **IRRITANT OF THE WEEK**

SHADOW Immigration Minister Shayne Neumann for refusing to debate Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton at the National Press Club. Why? Could it be Labor strategists thought he simply wasn't up to it. Newman holds the Ipswich-based seat of Blair that partly adjoins Dutton's Dickson stronghold.